

## Introduction

The diversity of the contributions assembled in this volume is fully intended. It is a reflection of an interdisciplinary approach and above all of a historiographical scepticism which characterises postmodernist approaches and which is also apparent in the title of this volume: "histories" – also in the meaning of fictional stories<sup>1</sup> – should be considered as an alternative or at least as a necessary completion of "history" because traditional historiographical discourse tends to screen out a number of well-known contradictions. Above all, it is becoming increasingly obvious that traditional historical discourses also implicitly pursue goals which reach beyond the objective, rational and enlightened analysis of the past. They confer and describe a collective identity which results from the confirmation of foundational myths, from the establishment of a canon of outstanding and decisive events which both explain the particular fate of the social group concerned and their particular home rights to their part of the world.

The enlightened historical discourse deliberately eliminates a particularity pertaining to any other approach: the knowledge that it is neither total nor infinite. It will always consist of a collection of "(hi)stories" which changes in the course of time and with the change of the story-teller. The diversity of views and interpretations represent a necessary diversity of voices due to the fact that each history and story depends on a story-teller who will transcribe the past to the requirements of the present. Whenever they are told, each story links two levels of time – the time of the event and the time of its narration.

The polyphony engendered by dissolving History into (hi)stories is closely related to another basic problem which nearly all the contributors take into account: the question of the borderline between the documentary and the fictional which appears less and less clear; the concepts of truth and authenticity, which produce this distinction, are becoming very relative. Different epochs and different cultures define these concepts differently and even within our own cultures, various notions of truth may coexist: "true" may, for instance, mean "verifiable", "relevant" or "significant". Truth and invention are not always basic categories which exist prior to the text; particularly when dealing with colonial documents, it is not difficult to prove that the extensively used affirmation of truth

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<sup>1</sup>Unfortunately the plural of history does not offer the same double meaning in English as in other languages of the Congress; in French, Spanish and German it corresponds to the term "story", a wordplay which we will reproduce by using brackets - "(hi)stories" - whenever the double meaning is referred to.

("historia verdadera") belongs to the *genre* and is part of the fiction. Whenever the notion of truth is overstressed, we have good reason to be suspicious, for it may indicate a strong necessity on the part of the author to dissimulate a deficiency in legitimisation. On the other hand, the deliberate encoding of "true" events is an equally well-known strategy. In a number of genres, the mixing of the documentary and the fictional is a current practice. This is the case, for example, with the testimonials by the Cuban author Miguel Barnet. In the course of their publication, the search for a scientific "truth" in his four testimonials gradually disappears in favour of a literary representation.

The general epistemological problems of historiography as they appear in postmodern thought, for instance, are increased by the more specific problems related to the Caribbean area. In a general sense, a colonial history may be written from two very different points of view: one pertains to the colonial powers for whom colonial history is part of their national history; another one pertains to the colonised whose voice will not be heard unless they implicitly employ the style and contents of the dominant history. Thus the "history of resistance" becomes a complement to the "history of power". In the Caribbean slave societies, the discourse of the victims is silenced by the continuous repression; part of this consists in excluding the slaves from the written word and the corresponding styles of language. There is no history of slavery told by those who suffered from it.

The still vivid debates on the questions of how far parts or traces of African culture and languages eventually survived their transfer to the Americas and whether the slaves were able to safeguard a cultural personality different from that of the oppressors show the entrenchment of Western ignorance and prejudice. Even when speaking on behalf of the slave, and also when uttering ritual excuses while remembering the history of slavery, Europeans continue their patriarchal attitudes which are part of the heritage of abolitionism. Whether guilty or not, Europeans present themselves as actors in the colonial drama; whether they enslave or free their victims, they implicitly reduce them to objects without their own identity, culture and capacity to act.

The problems of the distorted subject-object-relations remain until today and make it difficult to conceive of a genuine Caribbean history along the lines of traditional historiography. It seems impossible to overcome the bias of colonial source materials and their dependence on the colonial perspective. There is no "heroic history" of the Caribbean either in the sense of foundational myths or of 19th-century nationalism. Even the example of the Maroon slaves is ambiguous; the history of their deeds never became the backbone of an epic or popular history of the Caribbean which would have saved it from oblivion in the oral culture. Today we

are becoming more and more aware that the memory of the past and the creation of historical discourses is liable to vary considerably according to the social or regional background of the people who create it. This is all the more true of the Caribbean area which offers a degree of heterogeneity seldom found in other parts of the world. Though the perspectives of history may differ, they are characterised by the close neighbourhood from which all emerge and they interlace and complete each other. Where History is absent, histories assume its role. These may be stories which thrive anonymously within oral cultures or are created by well known writers like Edouard Glissant who openly declared his novels to be attempts to fill the gaps left by historiography.

All these questions and problems which remain unsolved and unsolvable make up the general background of the fourteen essays in this volume, presented at the IV. *Interdisciplinary Congress of the Society of Caribbean Research* which took place at the Iberoamerican Institute in Berlin, Germany. It is clear from the preceding discussion that, whatever the selection, it can never be all-encompassing, systematic and representative. The more important guidelines of the present publication were the handling of metahistorical problems and the question of evaluating source material which includes the interpretation of fictional or non-fictional texts. In a general way, the articles in this volume are intended to present and integrate research on two levels. First, they treat a particular problem, but they also reflect on their own generation and position within history in a larger sense. Second, they are part of a "history of history" within an area which has been one of the main battle-grounds of emerging modernity while hardly being aware of it.

The articles in this volume were grouped into three main sections which are based on the considerations previously discussed. In the first section the articles address the particular problems related to colonial history and its source material. The question of authorship and its legitimisation is the subject of Sabine Hofmann's essay on the chronicles of Rochefort and Du Tertre. The Dutch historian Wim Hoogbergen, who is a renowned specialist in Maroon cultures, treats the historiographical problems due to the scarcity of source material when dealing with the history of resistance. His contribution focuses on the famous Brazilian Maroon community of Palmares, but he also refers to data from neighbouring Surinam. Even more than in comparable cases, Palmares has become the site of fictions; the lack of reliable sources gives room for the thriving of myths which, though dubious from a historiographical point of view, are very important for the identity of the Afro-Brazilian community. In a similar way, the British historian Gad Heuman discusses the echo the Morant Bay rebellion in Jamaica has received in literary and documentary texts. He discusses how and to what degree such texts are influenced by the need

for interpretations which are "suitable" according to the changing needs of the Jamaican collectivity.

The second section begins with a voluminous contribution by the British anthropologist Jean Besson. She focuses on the statement by Genovese that "The history of the lower classes has yet to be written". Besson's general theme is the subsequently necessary change of perspective and historical methodology which has to take anthropology and neighbouring disciplines into account. The essay by Barbara Bush is similarly comprehensive, although it is oriented towards the understanding of women during slavery. Both articles discuss, within their broad scope, general concepts such as the creolisation processes (Jean Besson) or Afro-American identities (Barbara Bush) as bases of Caribbean cultures which transcend colonial and linguistic borders of a very heterogeneous area. The extension of this area is illustrated by the following two articles which focus on a Caribbean rim country – the Atlantic Coast of Columbia. Annedore Cruz Benedetti's topic is the Caribbean oral culture, its narrative genres and the animal tales in particular. Juliana Ströbele-Gregor deals with discursive strategies which "fictionalise" the prevailing traditional gender relations. In the last contribution in this section, Aart Broek uses the example of the former Dutch Caribbean colonies to describe the difficulties which accompany the transition from the oral to the literate culture of a Creole language. These range from refusal and scepticism to the problems which arise when the dominant culture tries to control this transitional process. The article also demonstrates that the introduction of Creole literacy is the only possibility to maintain the language and its oral literature traditions.

The third part of the volume is dedicated to Caribbean fictional literature and its multiple relations with historiography. The literature may simply relate history. It may complement it by "invention" and, not the least important, it makes history and historiography a part of a metahistorical discourse. The section starts with the article by Susanne Klengel which illustrates the cultivation of literariness as an important contradiction when it is part of a culture which is different from that which it tries to conceive and to represent. Talking about the other, making him a subject of literature may result in its invention or in the destruction of its autonomy. Klengel opposes a particular approach based on a process of continuous self-reflection; the surrealist discourse on America as demonstrated in André Breton's attitude towards America is presented as such a possible alternative.

The literary work by Manuel Zeno Gandía is the topic of Wolfgang Binder's essay which also illustrates the problem of an adequate attitude towards the other. In the eyes of Zeno Gandía, Puerto Rico is a "sick world" which is a characteristic end-of-century perspective determined

by positivism and naturalism. Kleinert's complex analysis of one of the novels by Cabrera Infante is also based on a sceptical view of history. Cabrera adopting a larger context of narrative strategies and ideas, is more sophisticated and implicitly leads towards a post-modern understanding of history. The articles by Helmtrud Rumpf and Kathleen Gyssels present the *Antillanité* in the French Caribbean which is a philosophical and literary movement of prime importance to our subject. Rumpf discusses the theoretical base of this movement and demonstrates its transposition into fictional literature. The literary paradigm used by both Rumpf and Gyssels is the novels by Simone Schwarz-Bart which are among the most prominent examples of empowering history through fiction. After these very complex and sophisticated positions and theories - which, despite their regional designation, aim at a French and international readership - the last contribution brings us back to a more Caribbean literature: Cornelia Fichtl discusses the Jamaican women's theatre and its social functions which are more directly related to Caribbean space and Caribbean women and men.

In conclusion, we want to express our thanks to all the friends and colleagues who helped us with the organisation of the congress and the publication of this volume. We were almost entirely dependent on the voluntary and non-remunerated help of so many people that it would be impossible to name them all. Two people are representative: Prof. Dr. Briese-meister - without whose efforts this publication would not have been possible - found the necessary funds despite the very precarious financial situation, and Jörg Schulze accepted the huge task of converting all the manuscripts from the various computer programs into a single computer system.